

Perilous Intersections

a solo rpg engine
by Rory Bracebuckle
version 1

inspired by the great pioneers of solo gamers, especially Tom
Pigeon and John Fiore



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What's It All About?

Perilous Intersections is a lightweight engine to power your solitaire roleplaying game adventures. It works by directing you to answer the *Big Questions* that brings a hero into conflict with a setting's threat. It keeps some measure of surprise while the emergent plot provides resistance to the protagonist's motivations. It works best with characters that have strong motivations and are action-driven. It can work in tandem with any existing RPG system, and is interactive, responding to the PC's efforts to counter the main antagonist, making her choices matter.

At the heart of this solo engine are *intersections*. An *intersection* is a particular method of interpretation whereby one runs a random idea prompt through a filter. This filter always provides a "push" on the PC's goals and motivations, and sometimes against her directly. It is similar to some novelists' plot tools, in which unexpected story events cause a deflection of the protagonist's chosen course. Thinking of any adventure like a line (or the oft disparaged "railroading" technique in traditional tabletop roleplaying games), this will cause the course to change, creating lots of twists and turns in the plot structure. It can (and often will) cause some serious shifts in the PC's perspective as things are revealed not to be what they first seemed.

Perilous Intersections also has a timing mechanism that brings urgency to the scenario and demands resolution. Like any similar solo engine (Mythic GM Emulator, the 9Q's, and many other great indie games), it relies heavily upon proper interpretation of random prompts and cues. Largely intended as a solo engine, it can be used in a group setting, giving a collaborative approach to a *GM-full* multi-player structure, similar to the Mythic GM Emulator.

Largely, this engine provides a method for scene framing with mechanics for allowing and removing the solitaire player's narrative control, and for making his choices meaningful.

What Does It Do?

As said before, *Perilous Intersections* is largely a scene framing structure. However, it's loose. What it should do is allow a bit of a back and forth between the player and the mechanics. Certain actions and rolls will make the PC's actions, choices, and inquiries matter, and actually grant the player some measure of narrative license. When these actions fail or go awry, the system will "push back" against the player's initial desires.

Many solo engines or GM-replacement systems provide charts for the players to consult or roll against so that it feels like someone else giving you creative input. *Perilous Intersections* not vastly different. With previously published systems, many players have debated how much of the impetus comes from the solo engine versus what the player had in mind from the beginning. Ofttimes, relying more on the engine to determine things may produce more threads that may wander too far from their original path, or produce results do not seem logical, or even wander into territory in which the player has no interest to follow. In *Perilous Intersections*, the player *is* given the license to provide narrative detail, and the system may prompt that at times from the player. When things do not go to the PC's liking, *Perilous Intersections* will demand an interpretation of the idea that is as counter to the first thing that came into the player's head. However, by and large, the player is free to toy with themes and aspects of play that he finds interesting.

Perilous Intersections will also provide a framework for dynamic action and scenes that will push with greater acceleration, and, in the end, produce an improvised but complete plot line with logical motivations by NPCs.

Seeding

First of all, using any *idea generator* (see below), draw five to nine words, images, icons, or phrases. The number of ideas you choose will impact the length and difficulty of your scenario. You will do nothing with them just yet. Look at them and let them stew in your head. If you know you want to include a few special items, you can seed a few of those without the need to randomly draw. Some examples of pre-determined seeds might be, “*I want my adventure to be about fur-clad ice giants and crystal balls*”, “*I like WWI biplanes and giant gorillas*”, or “*oases and mirages are cool!*”. Even pre-existing backstory elements that you’d like to see come to play can work. Create at least half of your ideas from random input. We’ll call these idea elements *Seeds*.

Why list them all now? *Perilous Intersections* is not strictly all about random prompts to generate scenes. A good part of the system is built around player choices. Having a pre-determined list allows you to pick choice ones. Using *intersections*, it still will not result in scene setups that might first come to mind. Running the prompt through the *intersection* filter, the result will still not be identical to a player’s first inkling.

Idea Generators

Here are a few idea generators worth checking out. Most idea generators will be icons, pictures, words, or even a combination. Even having a dictionary present and finding a random word or definition can be meaningful.

1. [Rory’s Story Cubes](#)
2. The Event Meaning generator in Word Mill’s [Mythic GM Emulator](#)
3. The word and image creator on [Idea Generator](#)

PC Goals

Second, your hero needs something to do. If you are good coming up with ideas, go ahead and state a simple sentence of what your character's current task/goal/or motivation is. This thing will most likely be scaled to a single adventure; however, it might be more grand. Examples could be, "*James has been tasked by the Postmaster General with resolving the postal strike in Jackson Hole*" or "*Fabian the Bold seeks to undermine his nemesis, the Archduke Xavier Ribaldi*".

If you're like me, sometimes you need some ideas to get the ball rolling. Here's a generic mission builder to help you fashion a reason for being proactive:

1. Draw two or three new things with your *idea generator* (not to be confused with those you drew for your *Seeds*).
2. Infer an *intersection* between these elements and come up with a problem that might put the two elements at odds with each other — a problem about which the protagonist would be concerned. For example, if the image of an apple and a tree is drawn, perhaps there is a shortage of carts in the village to drive produce from the orchards to the market.
3. Next, pick or roll a d6 to answer what the character's role is:
 - Support — the character's role is secondary to other major players
 - Escort — the character must accompany the main means of achieving the objective for protection (or social company, or whatever)
 - Seek and Destroy — something needs to be eliminated from the game world
 - Rescue/Recover — classic damsel in distress kind of stuff
 - Reconnaissance — spy missions!
 - Intercept — someone or something is going to cause trouble somewhere where it shouldn't; make sure it doesn't happen
4. If needed, determine if the character's stance is aggressive/active or defensive/reactive.
5. Put it all together to determine your character's *raison d'être*.

This reason need not be an epic quest (although it could be!), but rather something that's demanding the protagonist's immediate attention. When you're finished, try to write a complete sentence that answers the *Who*, *What*, *Where*, *Why*, and *How* of the PC's plot line.

Begins the Drama

Play general proceeds like this. As long as there is enough reason to start a first scene (or proceeding scene), frame it. Choose an appropriate scenic stage for the action to begin. It may even be the subject of some commonplace or mundane thing. Scene setups may always be initiated with a statement of intent by the PC. What does she intend to accomplish?

During each scene, pick one of your *Seeds* to create an *intersection*. An *intersection* is an idea, obstacle, or goal that is counter to one's own — or even against oneself. During each scene, answer the following question:

How might the idea intersect with the character's current action or goal and cause her course to deflect, demanding a response or course correction?

After you have entered the *Rears Its Ugly Head* phase (see phases below), rephrase the question:

How might the idea intersect with the character directly and cause her a significant, and even personal complication, perhaps even bringing the potential for great physical, social, or emotional harm?

Your main goal that will drive the adventure is to ask and answer (and sometimes *avoid*), if possible, the *Big Questions*. Whether the scene results in answering one of these *Big Questions* or not, a *Seed* will always provide a push against either the PC's motivation or to harm her directly.

This aspect of scene framing may take some practice to get into the swing of it. If an intersection interpretation doesn't have enough *oomph* to it, you may find that it is not providing enough push to see a significant change. Plot twists are automatically introduced this way. A PC's attitudes, motivation, or perspective should have some sort of change, otherwise the interpretation is too watery. Don't be afraid to get a little dirty in the process of pushing. If the interpretation results only in some sort of barrier that the PC must hurdle and continue on with her plan, this too is not in the spirit of an intersection (although it may lean more this way after *Rears Its Ugly Head*). This is not a random encounter generator!

The Four Phases

Each of the following four phases are defined by the *Big Questions* that lead to the final resolution of the adventure.

Something Amiss

This is the first stage of the adventure, where things begin to cause the PC to deviate from her course and strongly insinuate that something is wrong — something that has the potential to obstruct her goals. In terms of the *Big Questions*, once two of these have been answered, the protagonist is no longer in the *Something Amiss* phase. Throughout the events and scenes taking place during this phase, the antagonist — whoever that may be — will not yet have the PC fully on his radar. Likewise, the hero will probably not know who or what the enemy is yet (although there will be hints) or what that enemy may be trying to accomplish.

Rears Its Ugly Head

This second stage comes about once two of the *Big Questions* have been answered. Here's where we're cooking with fire! Whereas during previous scenes, events counter to the protagonist's begin to derail her, here obstacles come full on. Instead of an *intersection*, we have full-on collisions. The enemy is, or soon will be known, and pivotal now to completing his diabolical plan is eliminating any threats to that plan, which will likely mean the PC. Events during this phase will have the hero featured near to equal in the enemy's perspective alongside his other goal. Simply put, the PC must be eliminated. It's okay if some of these scenes provide a major obstacle for the PC, but there still should be some aspect of plot deflection in them. For example, a band of heroes meeting a tribe of angry Orlargs who wants to destroy the heroes is okay, but a band of Orlargs who happen to have the princess hostage is better.

The Final Boss Fight

I don't really mean a literal final boss fight — anything logical could happen. If the recently revealed plot looks like a takedown of the postal service center by a ex-employee seeking revenge through legal means,

then the final confrontation might be an extended court battle. Whatever best frames the final showdown against the antagonist, go with that idea. In most rpg game sessions, players will actually seek or be pushed into a violent life-or-death conflict. That's fine too.

In any case, once the *Big Questions* are answered, it should signal the final showdown in the next scene. The player can delay this, however, if it helps him to balance the situation to the PC's favor.

If there are any *Seeds* remaining after the scene in which the last of the *Big Questions* are resolved, the PC can try to fill a couple of requirements to take more action before a conflict. These include:

1. *A Fightback Scene*
2. *A Last Ditch Effort*

Fightback Scene

If a character wants to tip the odds back to her favor (thus reducing the *Danger Level*, or *DL*, or gain some other fictional advantage), she can initiate a *Fightback Scene*. As long as there are unused *Seeds* remaining, the player can insert one *Fightback Scene* for each remaining *Seed*. But be careful! At this point, failure means the odds tip back the other way.

At this point of the adventure, for example, knowing that disgraced postal officer Wayans plans to blow open several scandals, James frantically seeks some dirt on him in time to submit evidence to the DA. However, James fails to find any, and as a result the Danger Level increases — perhaps former officer Wayans's legal team finds out what James was up to and is able to adjust their strategy to level charges directly against him!

Last Ditch Effort

The second way to delay a final showdown is a *Last Ditch Effort*. If no *Seeds* remain, a delay of one scene can take place. Draw a new idea and make an *intersection* aimed directly at the PC. Resolve the scene. However it turns out, whether a change in the *DL* takes place or not, a strong consequence related to delay comes to being. This consequence is irrevocable. If after that, if it does not make narrative sense or it is

impossible for the showdown to occur, then the full extent of the antagonist's plot as revealed by the *Big Questions* comes to bear. In essence, the PC loses.

The Showdown

Eventually, when the final showdown scene takes place, roll a d6 modified by the current *DL*. On a 5+, 1-2 of the *Big Questions* will be altered. If this happens, draw two new *Seeds* for each of the *Big Questions* targeted by amendment. Now, form a problematic *intersection* that suggests a shocking twist to the selected *Big Questions*, always making things more complicated and giving tough choices to the protagonist.

Here's where Darth Vader reveals that he's Luke's father, where the Dread Pirate Roberts turns out to be Buttercup's long lost love. Remember that anytime the PC establishes a fact from a precious scene's questions, that particular *Big Question* is off limits for amendment at this stage. If a question to which a reliable answer has been previously provided is randomly selected in this phase, then "Good detective work, James!" You may then nullify that particular twist.

Resolve the showdown given the context of info given so far, the setting, and the opposition suggested by the *DL*. Needless to say, the setup must be done in such away that to ignore it will result in disaster. The result cannot be a stalemate. The scene plays out for good or ill.

The Aftermath

Some players like a scene or two to tie up loose ends or have a proper denouement. You don't need rules for this, just summarize in a sentence or two what happens at the conclusion of the adventure. Try to imagine what changes in your setting, and the attitude or well-being of its inhabitants. If you want some uncertainty at the end, draw an additional idea or two. State a simple sentence of what you expect from the aftermath of the adventure. Then create an *intersection* using the new ideas to deflect your expected conclusion off course.

Event Interpretation

When you need to know what happens to the PC in a scene, you always start by interpreting one of your *Seeds* as an event within the context of what has happened, the PC's current goal, and the phase of the adventure during which she finds herself. This event need not be of earth-shaking importance (although it may be!). It also may not be the result of a contemporaneous event. It may take the form of overhearing a piece of gossip, a flashback scene that suddenly becomes relevant, or a here-and-now threat that immediately changes the vector of action from this point forward.

To give context, the amount of danger (the target numbers faced by the PC, the NPC level, obstacle difficulty, or what have you in your RPG system of choice) for this event will be at or less than the current *Danger Level*, or *DL* (see below). Every *intersection* event will be framed by a number of contexts. Roll or choose whether its focus is a:

1. Confrontation
2. Competition
3. Revelation

The target may be the PC herself, an innocent bystander, or a political faction depending on the greater context and phase of play. Use a combination if needed. Whatever makes logical sense is fair game. However the event is framed, it will be expressed by pushing on the character's action or goal for the scene, or confronting her directly if you are beyond the *Something Amiss* phase.

For example, if James is flying to Jackson Hole to meet the administrative head of the postal service there, and the seed, "belittle authority" is mixed with a confrontation with the protagonist, this manifests with a juicy scene complication: *James lands and picks up his rental car. He notices he's tailed from the airport by a thorny looking member of a biker gang. When he pulls up to his motel, the biker dude intimidates him under threat of pain to leave town.*

This event would make more sense during *The Opposition Rears Its Ugly Head* phase. If it's during the *Something Amiss* phase, this might rather be

that he has a chance meeting with the mean biker guy on the way to the office administrator rendezvous, and the biker guy doesn't yet know that James is interested in the same thing.

The Big Questions

At the end of the scene, James's player must try to answer one of the *Big Questions* if he can, even if it's a tenuous or unproven theory (which can be disproven later, as we shall see). In the example above, he has a pretty good answer for a *How*, guessing that someone is paying low-level street toughs to blackmail and threaten townsfolk. This may change, or even get elaborated on, in future scenes, but for now, that's an elevation in the *DL*.

From this point, more scenes will follow that may answer one of the *Big Questions*:

- **Who?** all events point to a person, or better yet an affiliation, be it an organization or group. In the initial stages, this question should not be answered specifically or conclusively.
- **What?** this is about what the nameless antagonist is doing. This action also should be cryptic enough that a *Who* and *Why* are not immediately knowable. Ofttimes the *What* is about the end-result of the action. *Take over the city, or destroy the elven resistance* can be good *What's*.
- **When?** this is an optional one. However, sometimes the need to answer this will be an obvious one. When the serial killer will strike again may be the last piece of a puzzle.
- **How?** this is interchangeable with and often encountered earlier than a *What*. Separated from the more clearly macro prospective *What*, a *How* can tell us about the action in the here-and-now, the clues, without the context of a *What*. *Masked men escaping CIA headquarters under fire, or an ambush on the elvish outpost* could all be good *How's*.
- **Where?** like *When*, above, this is an optional one. However, in adventure games about exploration, this will be a featured question you may want to include. If it's about finding a treasure, *Where* might be one of the last ones. You might need to discover a *Where* in order to bring the fight to the enemy or to undermine his potency.
- **Why?** this is the big one. The true motivation of the antagonist will usually be the last reveal of the adventure, and not until just before the big boss fight.

Each scene may establish at least some partial context for one of these. Let the protagonists be proactive when trying to set scenes that begin to answer these questions. He can always try to accomplish goals or actions. In the process, he may also be learning the answers to the *Big Questions*. When all questions are largely answered, you will be able to see the entire plot revealed. The particular deflections caused by *intersections* or collisions during the adventure thus far will lend context to that plot.

_____ (*Who?*) tries to _____ (*How?*) which will _____ (*What?*) because of _____ (*Why?*).

When the plot is finally revealed with *Why*, being the last piece of the puzzle (note that the PC might figure this one out on his/her own without further events leading him there), it must be in direct conflict to, or in competition with, the PC's own motivation or goal. It will interpose itself with the protagonist dangerously, and often personally.

Thanks to *intersections*, scenes will naturally intensify after the first one during the *Something Amiss* stage. If there are clear things the protagonist can do or paths she may tread, then that scene can come into play. In our example, maybe James needs to break into the records office by night to look for evidence of tampered surveillance footage. Then, another *intersection* event can take place as described above. Each new *intersection* takes into context all that has happened so far. If the PC has no idea what actions to take, the scene event will exert itself of its own volition without her prompt. In such a case, it will provide a stronger push, elevating the danger to her directly, or those she cares about (even if she is not yet in *Rears Its Ugly Head* phase).

How you interpret these events in terms of scene framing is up to you. If you want to roll whether an event happens before, during, or after a character's intended scene action, do so. If logic dictates that the event would be revealed as the result of the character's action, then do it that way. There are no rules, as interpreting *Seeds* within a given context may require some flexibility and is a bit of an art. Your own decision making power will be important not to get stuck. However, do try to make these interpretations complicate the PC's life, pushing her into difficult decisions and situations.

Time Is of the Essence

As the *Seeds* begin to tick off, things will accelerate. The *Big Questions* will begin to answer themselves. To make this so, there cannot be more unanswered questions than there are ideas remaining. If this condition occurs, answers will begin to make themselves known despite a character's actions. Shocking facts may be revealed to the PC through word of mouth, a premonition, accidental view of surveillance tape, or the like — or any way that makes sense and accelerates the process. If so, their *intersections* with the protagonist will hit them even harder, and push the hero into life-or-death situations — tangled complications that have the potential for great volatility. You may also use personal attributes or relationships to make the danger much closer to home.

What? Now the biker gang has my sister hostage?

Story Probes

Since the PC is free to start scene setups and the solo player is free to pick from the desired *Seeds* at will, it will be necessary at some point to determine the answer to some yes or no questions to clarify what the PC learns. There is a mechanism for this.

During scenes, the PC may proactively probe theories, gather intelligence, make preparations, or even conduct missions to directly harm their opponents. After resolving obstacles in the scene suggested by *intersections* (or immediately if the context makes more sense), the player may ask one *Story Probe* to test a theory or determine a fact.

In this case, roll 1d6, and modify by the current value of the *DL*. If the result is 5+, the answer is Yes. Frame questions in a way as to present dangerous or inconvenient answers. A question may not be asked until the fictional positioning at hand allows for it to be asked. In other words, there has to be a reason the PC is learning this — *James has broken into the surveillance room, Han Solo discovers that the control room is empty and reinforcements are en route*.

Once a Yes answer has been provided, that establishes an absolute FACT that cannot be amended, even during the *Final Boss Fight* (see above). A result of No means one of two things:

1. The PC found a dead end, or;
2. The PC learns something

You can freely choose which condition occurs based on logic or you may randomly choose. Sometimes a dead end will make sense so not to outright disprove what you guess it may be. Sometimes, however, it will make sense that a PC must learn *something*. The thing they thought was not true; that's fine. But if they stand to learn something, draw one new random idea and draw an intersection between it and your question. The result cannot be another substitute for the thing you asked in the first place. Rather, it must present some complication and represent as much of an opposite to the thing you were seeking that you can logically interpret. This, however, will not necessarily provide an absolute FACT like a 'Yes' answer will. It also must provide enough "bump" to push the PC's

direction into a new area, much like interpreting an *intersection* during a scene setup.

A *Story Probe* question must be fashioned in a specific way. Asking a *Who* is bad form. Asking, “Is the banished Lord Orpheo in attendance in court?” is absolutely apropos. Never directly ask the answer to one of the *Big Questions*. Note that getting an absolute FACT does not necessary make one of the *Big Questions* immune to amendment later — it *may*, but it will depend on what you discover. It’s just off limits to amendment during the *Final Boss Fight*. This is your chance to be creative and assert a little narrative into the story. There’s no need to roll on tables or pick a random encounter...phrasing the question creatively is all you need.

Why only one *Story Probe*?

Sometimes it may make sense for a whole bunch of things to be discovered during a given situation. However, in movies and books, the drama has to be paced in such a way to build our interest and keep us guessing. Try to interpret all *Story Probes* given that only one thing can be discovered. Players may make a stretch and try to connect a few details together to come up with a theory that may answer a detail or sketch regarding more than one of the *Big Questions*, but that’s from deduction, rather than from how the *Story Probe* is answered.

Not All Answers Are Correct Ones

Big Questions answered through deduction or hunches — or in other words, those filled in without testing with an actual *Story Probe* — can, and probably will change throughout an adventure as more details are made clear. Details can and will be changed along the way through shocking twists. As mentioned above, a *Story Probe* is a player’s way of exercising more narrative control. You may find yourself revising your *Big Questions* as play proves or disproves previously established details.

Asking Other Questions

What about other story details? Is there a mechanism for determining other things?

In short, no. Sure, if you are imagination-challenged during a pinch, or want help deciding on environmental details, it's okay to ask some open questions. Feel free to draw some random idea prompts and interpret them. These will be different than *intersections* which filter through a more exacting process that pushes and tugs at the plot line. Try not to do this, as it can be tempting to “discover” some things that will change the direction of play or break the rules. Such open questions should only provide a little narrative color. If it determines any sort of complication or boon, that is going beyond what detail questions should do. Try to infer as much detail from a scene's *intersection* as possible. Feel free to simply make up stuff that supports your setup interpretation. If you need more, make up more. Season with little details to taste.

What will absolutely work fine as a substitute in this regard is to engage with your RPG system of choice. Like the Mythic GM Emulator, and the 9Qs, this solo engine is a “bolt-on” type that works in tandem with a conventional roleplaying game. Currently, there are many popular narrative-driven systems out there, including Fate, Dungeon World, and so forth. Many of these will introduce twists along the way through their mechanics. This is completely fine and designed to work with *Perilous Intersections*. In general, scene framing will be a loose affair with a high degree of interpretational control. There is no need to strong-arm anything into a predetermined plot structure. Therefore, the RPG system you have chosen for your session can and will create opportunities and situations that may change the course of your original scene setup, providing complications as PC's fail at difficult obstacles — and, of course, provide some surprising answers to questions you may have along the way.

Danger Level

The *Danger Level*, or *DL*, is a form of measurement that represents the ability for a threat to harm the PC. The *DL* also represents the scale of any resistance, obstacle, or NPC opponent value in terms of rank with respect to the PC's own (as qualified by your chosen RPG's system). It is system agnostic. Interpret this level in terms of enemy stats and obstacle target numbers as you see fit.

Difficulty Level (DL)

Character's Position Is	Opposition Scale/Story Question Modifier
Advantaged	-1
At Odds	0
Disadvantaged	+1
Overwhelmed by Opposition	+2

During a session, a player tracks the escalation or devaluation of this level depending on the context of a scene's resolution. The level can only do three things — it can go up by one degree, stay the same, or go down, provided there is still room on the scale to make the proposed change. If multiple criteria are met to change the level, weight them all, canceling out criterion in opposition until you are left with one choice. Despite how many criterion are met to lead one to change the level, one step in a direction is the maximum degree of change.

The *DL* goes down when:

- The PC successfully takes proactive steps to thwart the antagonist or his plans (defeat his minions, or plant an obstacle, for example)
- For each unreliable of the *Big Questions* that gets clarified by the PC to become a fact

The *DL* goes up when:

- The PC fails to thwart the antagonist or his plans during a *Fightback Scene* (see *The Big Boss Fight* above)
- The PC suffers a setback
- For each of the *Big Questions* that gets answered (but not when an already existing answer is altered)

A setback is defined by a significant failure in a scene as dictated by your RPG of choice. Examples include the PC failing to defend herself and getting pummeled by a whole tribe of orcs, giving up crucial info to the big bad's minions during an interrogation, or ending up tipping her hand in an important social conflict, or the like.

For example, James discovers that the HDR on the video surveillance system has been smashed. He snaps some pictures and dusts for prints, getting a few good clues. At the same time, he answers two of the *Big Questions* — *How?* and *Who?* (one by deduction, and one through the player's Story Probe). That's one in favor of the DL going down, and two against the DL going down. Canceling out one in favor, and one against, it still leaves the DL going up one level. If only one of the Big Questions got answered, then the DL would stay put where it was at the start of the scene.

The new *DL* always takes effect at the beginning of setting the next scene.

Additional Notes on Opposition

Remember that every scene should have a push back against whatever action the character is doing. It may be passive or active. The *DL* will always give context to the amount of danger the PC faces. The idea may give context to its form or manifestation. If a *Seed* is interpreted for some other driving purpose within a scene, you may also logically choose an obstacle that is consistent with what happened so far without tying it directly to the *Seed*. For example, if Harold the Destroyer's player uses his *Seed* to determine that the Jewel of Nicaelus is no longer in the temple when he arrives, he need not use that same *Seed* to determine what obstacle he faces. Instead, it may just be logical that he has to deal with a stubborn templar to get answers out of him (and thus facilitating a *Story Probe* if his intimidation attempt is successful).

To interpret the scale of challenge, establish a baseline relevant to your RPG system. Based on the character's position:

- *Advantaged* means the character should have more than enough resources to counter the scene obstacle or threat.
- *At Odds* means she's evenly matched.
- *Disadvantaged* means her resources will most definitely be taxed.
- *Overwhelmed by Opposition* means she will face at least two to one odds (if that results in serious opposition in your chosen RPG system).

The *DL* can never go above *Overwhelmed by Opposition* (+2) or below *Advantaged* (-1). The *DL* also modifies the roll made for *Story Probes* and twists in the *Final Boss Fight*.

Graphing

One issue many solo-goers have with their sessions is finding a convenient way to document the progress of their sessions. Here is an optional suggestion for creating a visual guide and concise summary. Using graph paper, create a box labeled on two dimensions — a numbered list of scenes along one side (you will often know approximately how many scenes will be in a game by the number of *Seeds* you draw), and the different grades of the *DL* along the *opposite* axis. Starting with “At Odds” at scene one, trace a line from point to point as scenes unfold. Make a quick, concise note at each scene point to summarize the action within, with short phrases of 2-3 words each. This simply gives a quick overall picture of the action and points of most or least dramatic tension.

At the bottom of the page, keep a place to mark the *Big Questions* to see the plot revealed. Use pencil, or at least leave space for amending, as the *Big Questions* will likely go through some changes. Lastly, make a list off to the side of your *Seeds* and tick them off as scenes progress.

A sample worksheet is provided in the end of these rules.

Dials

Perilous Intersections is a general framework with enough latitude for the player to make on-the-spot decisions. There's plenty of room to tinker with it. You can also play with dials to adjust for different styles of adventures and genres. Generally this will be done by designing a good *raison d'être*, *Seeding* and adding structure to the *Big Questions*. Just like *Seeding*, in which you can preload issues you'd like to see in your game, you can absolutely begin with some of the *Big Questions* already answered. You can also jump around, re-order, or eliminate parts of the three stages (*Something Amiss*, *The Opposition Rears Its Ugly Head*, *The Final Boss Fight*, *The Aftermath*).

Want a **murder mystery**? No problem! Questions will be answered in the following order:

1. How? (The scene of the grisly crime and its clues)
2. What? (A pattern of murders presents itself)
3. Why? (The motive or motives are deduced)
4. Who? (Enough evidence to confront the main suspect)

Want an adventure about **space marines**? Seed some weird sounding aggressive alien species, answer *Who* in advance, and eliminate *Why*.

What about a **US Marshals manhunt**? Start with an answered *Who* and end with *Where* last.

Some stories are only going to have need for one or two *Big Questions* total. If that's the case, pick the one and give the same question a few phases so that its answer really is drawn out over four parts. Perhaps an evil overlord threatens the kingdom. The only unanswered questions the player might have in mind are *How* and *Where* the big confrontation will happen. *Where* seems like the final one to be asked, while *How* might be split into three parts that details how reconnaissance reveals troop movements, court scenes reveal traitors in our midst, and so forth.

Four *Big Questions* to trigger the *Final Boss Fight* is the default with two of the questions being optional. It's fine, of course, to expand that number to all six, or split some of the questions up. In doing so, you will also have to

make a decision about where the four stages of play fall within the line of questioning.

Back to our manhunt example, maybe *Where* is really the only relevant thing for your purposes (you don't feel like delving into any depth of determining motives). Instead, you want to triangulate the location and direction your fugitive has been. Really that's a *How* (how he's getting around), and three stages of *Where* as the protagonist tracks sightings. Basically, you're answering the one question three times. If that's too long, eliminate one of the multiples.

Some adventures are already going to be about facing off against a known enemy. The protagonist's and antagonist's goals of competition (each wanting to harm the other) are already known. In this case, feel free to eliminate the number of *Big Questions* to whatever will answer the bare essentials in order to facilitate a final showdown, thereby expediting an otherwise needless buildup. A *Something Amiss* stage just might not make sense. The two sides are trying to affect each other from the get go... *Rears Its Ugly Head* stage makes sense from the very beginning. At other times, the standard start-up with *Danger Level* set at *Advantageous (-1)* may not be appropriate. Feel free to change that too.

Likewise, the reason for the number of starting *Seeds* is not just to direct pacing, but to adjust the challenge level of the adventure. The fewer *Seeds* there are, the the quicker the increase of difficulty your protagonist will encounter. The PC will have much less time to counter the threat, and when the showdown occurs, the chances are high that the opposition will be more than she can handle. The *Big Questions* will start to get answered with or without the PC's involvement, precipitating in a dynamic, dramatic, upward curve. With more *Seeds*, the PC will be able to take a bit more time seeing patterns, and intrigue can build more organically. The PC can also take actions to lessen the potential threat. Without the need to answer the *Big Questions* so quickly, the unfolding of the plot can feel more natural. The *Big Questions* will also change throughout play, bringing in unexpected twists.

Imposing an order to your *Big Questions* will probably have the greatest impact to the overall difficulty of your scenario. Sometimes a specific order will rule out certain logical discoveries, or limit what a character can do.

This may box the PC into an uncomfortable corner, perhaps even elevating the drama as she discovers dead ends and failure.

In essence, bend these guidelines to your will. If something doesn't make sense in the context of your adventure, then throw it out! You can always reevaluate the situation as you're going along in your adventure. If it makes sense to jump forward into some future phase, or answer one of the *Big Questions* on the spot because it's the only logical explanation, then do so! If the twists demanded by the *Final Big Boss Fight* are too hard to interpret, then discard them!

Your experience should be personal. These are guidelines, and away to introduce some uncertainty into your solo adventures. You may never play the same way twice. With practice, you will understand which elements need to change for the type of solitaire adventure for which you are aiming.

Perilous Intersections - Adventure Worksheet

PC(s):

Motivation/Mission:

Seeds

Big Questions
(Mark facts with "F")

1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
	Advantaged (-1)	At Odds (0)	Disadvantaged (+1)	Overwhelming Odds (+2)

Danger Level

Scene Summaries

Story Probes

One detailed narrative question per scene. May not directly ask one of the "Big Questions". Question must lead to a complication.

Roll d6 + DL modifier. On 5+ question leads to a Yes FACT. On a No:

- ❖ a dead end or,
- ❖ an opposing fact (draw 2 ideas and intersect)

The Phases

- ❖ **Something Amiss:** less than 2 "Big Questions" answered; intersections attack PC's motivation
- ❖ **Rears Its Ugly Head:** 2 or more "Big Questions" answered; intersections attack PC
- ❖ **The Final Boss Fight:** final "Big Question" answered — showdown
 - ➔ If Seeds remain, initiate **Fightback Scene** to delay showdown; lower DL, or elevate if fail
 - ➔ If no Seeds remain, initiate a single **Last Ditch Effort** scene; failure means plot comes to bear
 - ➔ Showdown scene; roll d6 + DL — on 5+, modify 1-2 Big Questions not established as fact
- ❖ **Aftermath:** the final denouement

Example: The King's Man

Setup

For the adventure setup, we're doing this off the cuff, so the player is not giving any specific structure to the number or format of the *Big Questions*. They will come as they come. He's also free to change his mind about these considerations mid-session.

Hero

Bron the Swift

The King's man, a personal friend. A renowned hunter who is tracking the outlaws who kidnapped the princess.

Seeds (6)

The player starts with 6, all random. Using Mythic event meaning generator, he gets:

- Triumph Hope
- Passion Stalemate
- Change Prison
- Refuse Power
- Spy Elements
- Bestow Friendship

Something Amiss

One

Danger Level: Advantageous (-1)

Scene Setup: Bron seeks to follow the outlaws' trail.

Seeds:

- Triumph Hope
- Passion Stalemate
- ~~Change Prison~~
- Refuse Power
- Spy Elements
- Bestow Friendship

Not having any idea about what *Seed* to use yet, the player draws randomly from the list — *Change Prison*.

He might think this suggests a trap of some sort. However, that doesn't really suggest a good intersection, or something that would cause a course correction. The leader of the gang leaving behind a couple of thugs would make sense. However, we're to nudge the character's goal a bit.

Instead, we get this (a revelation): Bron sees tracks break into two. Praying on luck, he follows one set which leads to Netherhall, the King's largest dungeon full of the worst elements of the realm. When arriving on the scene, chaos ensues. A prison break not only threatens the good folk of the realm, but confuses any further tracking attempts.

Desperate, Bron spies an outlaw and clips him with an arrow, incapacitating him.

Now, we roll a *Story Probe*. Bron wants to know the identity (Who?) of the outlaw leader and where he's taken the princess. That's two questions. Our player only gets to ask one (generally any plot will only spell out these *Big Questions* a little at a time — it's up to the player to come up with a plausible reason). He asks, "Is the leader the king's nephew, Hamus, who wanted to wed the princess in the past?" See how the player asked that? The question had some specific narrative detail, which is one of the

player's means of exerting some story details. Permission to ask this made sense through the fiction; he incapacitated an outlaw, who has a good chance of knowing this detail.

Bron's player only gets to roll a day with a -1 because of his position on the *Danger Level (Advantageous)*. Luck is not on his side, since he rolls a 1. It's either a dead end (perhaps in handling the thug too hard, the man dies before he can answer), or a piece of not-so-reliable intel. He chooses the latter and draws a new idea — “Change Vehicle”, trying to draw an intersection that will bump his first idea (Hamus) into a new trajectory. Instead, Bron's player assumes that this means Hamus's former confidant, Boris, an illegitimate son of a princeling who is rather thuggish — he is the captor of the princess and leading the thugs. Whether he's doing this for himself, or whether Hamus and him are in cahoots again can't be known for certain here. Nonetheless, we have a tentative *Who*.

Boris was wise enough not to let his goons know where he was taking the princess — that's a plausible reason Bron doesn't get to ask a second *Story Probe*. On top of that, the new situation threatens to allow the perpetrator to get away amid the confusion. So, we close and move onto the next scene.

Big Questions Answered:

- Who? Boris (unreliable)

Two

Danger Level: At Odds (± 0)

Scene Setup: Bron goes to find the castellan of Netherhall and warn him of the King's daughter and the real threat

Seeds:

- Triumph Hope
- Passion Stalemate
- ~~Change Prison~~
- ~~Refuse Power~~
- Spy Elements
- Bestow Friendship

Refuse Power sounds interesting, and Bron's player can see how this is relevant here. Since he has the license, as a player, to choose himself, he could easily go with something that might help him divert his course back where he wants, like *Triumph Hope*, but he prefers the intriguing route.

Putting this together, we get a Competing scene where Pierre, the castellan, who also happens to be the King's brother-in-law, doesn't want idiots bumbling around on his turf. Not only does he have to control the situation, it's his niece's life at stake. He doesn't know Bron, and doesn't trust her life to him. He orders Bron to stay out of the way while he and his men go on the hunt, even though Bron was doing the King a personal solid. Without social or rank skills to help out, Bron voices his protest, but can do nothing.

Now, for the Probe: not being in any position to get anything from Pierre, Bron only inquires of the steward of the castle, asking, "Did these prisoners have a connection with Boris?" His position on the *DL* doesn't grant a modifier to his roll, but get's lucky — he rolls a 5. Even without a modifier anything above a 5 works, so that's a Yes.

Turns out that, in fact, many of the outlaws imprisoned at Netherhall were bannermen of Boris, and many seemed ready as if prepared for the prison break.

Bron begins to piece together the plot — it appears Boris may be planning to challenge the throne. With the princess as bride, and old alliances reforged — he may have a chance to topple the King. Whether it's truly Boris, or Hamus, Bron can only take the outlaw's word he questioned with a grain of salt. However, he has enough for a *How*.

Big Questions Answered:

- Who? Boris (unreliable)
- How? By reforging old alliances — rivals of the king — and taking the princess as bride

Now that two *Big Questions* are answered, that moves us into the *Rears Its Ugly Head* phase. This is sort of a setback for the character, and a question has been answered. Either way, that's one step more dangerous.

Rears Its Ugly Head

Three

Danger Level: Disadvantageous (+1)

Scene Setup: Bron decides to sort out who is really behind the thing. He plans to go directly to Boris's lands to see what he can find out

Seeds:

- Triumph Hope
- Passion Stalemate
- ~~Change Prison~~
- ~~Refuse Power~~
- Spy Elements
- ~~Bestow Friendship~~

Here, Bron's player picks *Bestow Friendship*, which he hopes can strategically give him an edge in the story. He wants to reduce the potential *Danger Level*, so he has hopes that he will be able to survive a final confrontation and stem the threat. Since we're in the next phase, the intersection becomes a collision — attacking Bron or his interests more directly.

Thinking about it, Bron's player feels that the hero has been caught and is given an ultimatum: join us, or die! He imagines some real badasses (some of the worst dregs from Netherhall and evil men who can't abide the stench of the king or anyone who supports him). As soon as Bron steps on Boris's land, the mounted riders come out of the woodwork. He's outmanned and they press him hard.

Failing a check to disguise himself as a no-good outlaw, the riders see through the sham. They offer for him to join them against the king. Here, Bron sees it as an opportunity to work from within. As a spy, he can get close to Boris (or Hamus if he's still behind it). At least, he might get close to the princess and help her escape. He fools them, and they take him on to Castle Borislav.

For his Probe, Bron's player asks, "Is Hamus there consorting with Boris?" With a +1 to his roll, the player is more assertive that he will find an

affirmative. Rolling a 4, that's a Yes. He's there. Bron saw him and overheard some conversation. That's an inconvenient answer in many ways — Bron will have to tell the King that his nephew, who the King adores, is a traitor. This will get complicated quickly. Getting this info, Bron has scored a success. He's in close to the conspirators, and he's avoided answering two more *Big Questions*, but effectively made the two he knows off limits to twists later. However, from now on forward, events will precipitate quickly. He'll have to work very pro-actively and boldly to prevent further escalation of the *DL*. The player is also under no duress to get more questions answered as he still has three *Seeds* left. This is why he went to clarify an unreliable question, rather answer a new one.

Big Questions Answered:

- Who? Hamus, backed by Boris (now an absolute)
- How? By reforging old alliances — rivals of the king — and taking the princess as bride

Four

Danger Level: At Odds (± 0)

Scene Setup: Bron tries to find where they are keeping the princess and escape with her

Seeds:

- Triumph Hope
- ~~Passion Stalemate~~
- ~~Change Prison~~
- ~~Refuse Power~~
- Spy Elements
- ~~Bestow Friendship~~

Passion Stalemate shows that, after quickly finding the princess's tower room (it's always a tower room, right?), Bron bursts in like Luke Skywalker and says, "I'm here to rescue you!" To which, he surprisingly learns that she is in on the deal, loves Hamus, hates her Father, and calls the guards. *Ouch!*

Now comes a big chase scene as guards pursue Bron through hallways. Due to the current *DL*, he's able, at least, to avoid them and somehow

escapes into the woods. The jig is up! Boris and Hamus know all about the spy in the works and have marked Bron. This also answers some *Big Questions*. *Who* gets a bit more detailed, and it seems we for sure know (as if we didn't already) that *What* is all about about toppling King Henri-Alexandre. Bron's player didn't ask that as a Probe, but it's staring out at him. *Why* is also there too, because they all hate the King for something... it's a bit vague, but there's context for that.

That means, for his Probe, Bron can try to get a firmer answer on one of those questions. With everything answered, to some degree (*Where* doesn't really seem important...if it was, we would know at least where the conspirators are now too), and two *Seeds* left over, Bron can try some *Fightback Scenes* to work the *DL* down. It doesn't matter that everything got answered this scene — the *DL* can only inch its way up or down one step at a time. Next scene will be elevated again to *Disadvantaged*. However, if successful, Bron can try two more scenes to lower that to some level that he can defeat the plot.

Probe: “Are they seeking revenge for the past because Henri-Alexandre was abusive to Hamus and Charlotte when they were young?” A 5 means that's a Yes. That's not going to be an easy sell to the king. Yet, Bron is loyal — although tainted now by this new and messy truth.

Big Questions Answered:

- Who? Hamus, backed by Boris (absolute)
- What? Topple the king (unreliable)
- How? By reforging old alliances — rivals of the king — and taking the princess as bride (absolute)
- Why? Revenge for past abuses (absolute)

Five

During the next scene (a *Fightback Scene*), Bron goes to the king to tell him the troubles and try to get him to muster an army to defeat Hamus and his minions. Using *Triumph Hope*, the king is adamant that his daughter would never harbor any such feelings against him. However, he slumps into a fit of depression and issues no decree of action. Bron is unable to affect the morose monarch and instead goes to Hansel, his steward. Bron convinces him that defeat will be nigh if nothing is done. It's

still a success according to the RPG rules his player is using, and drives the *DL* back to *At Odds*.

Bron's player cannot think of another thing for a sixth scene to help even the odds. To do so would only risk elevating the risk again. He also doesn't find that Bron is in the fictional position to be able to ask another probe.

The Final Boss Fight

Six

The showdown takes place! Here's the place where there's a chance for a slight twist — on a 5 or greater, modified by the *DL*, any unreliable *Big Questions* can have intersections imposed on them. In this case, a roll of 4 is too low (we're *At Odds* here, so no modifier). The *Big Questions* stand as they are. If it had been a 5+, Bron's player would randomly select one or two of the Big Questions that might have new intersections drawn against them to create a twist. In this case, *What* is the only question that wasn't firmed down by Bron's work during the adventure.

In any case, in the final scene, Bron leads the King's forces in his stead as Boris's army sets out to meet them. It's a harrowing battle, Boris is slain, but Hamus and the princess escape together. All this was determined through the RPG his player was using.

The Aftermath

Using perhaps some new random ideas, Bron's player establishes that the King becomes even darker and unfit for rule. News of struggles in fiefs neighboring Hamus's lands reaches Kingshall. Although Henri-Alexandre's supporters try to keep the King's state of mind quiet, knowledge of that gets out and the people start calling for change. A revolution has started!

Bron is in a predicament weighing his own friendship against the needs of the kingdom. And a wild topsy-turvy ride that was!